

**MERCHANDISING TIP**

"The loudest possible ad vehicle you can have, is right in the store where the consumer is standing with their money in hand." - Paco Underhill

MasterTag PH: 1.800.253.0439 FX: 1.800.828.0003 www.mastertag.com

Merchandising solutions to keep your business growing.™



# A Relaxing Idea

**This year's GPN/MasterTag Marketing Innovation Award winner has really hit its target.**

**By Carrie Burns**



CEO Mark Elzinga and head grower Roger Rosenthal.

**T**he numbers are rising. People are investing more and more money and time in their gardens and backyards. According to The National Gardening Association, lawn and garden sales increased from \$30.2 billion in 1998 to \$38.4 billion in 2003, and just due to the American work ethic, people are more stressed than ever.

After surveying 312 Florida garden visitors, researchers at the University of Florida have found that visitors perceived their stress levels as lower after walking through the garden. It makes sense. We know the benefits of our products, but do others know that gardening and outdoor relaxation are great stress relievers? Mark Elzinga, CEO of Elzinga & Hoeksema Greenhouses, Portage, Mich., kept this in mind when creating its winning program, Tropical Flavors: A Backyard Tropical Escape. This program takes typical bedding plants and gives the consumer an escape from everyday stress.

## ELZINGA & HOEKSEMA GREENHOUSES

It's a common story: A child grows up to take over the family greenhouse after the father has retired. However, this story has twist. Elzinga did grow up working for his father at Elzinga & Hoeksema Greenhouses, but instead of waiting for his father to retire, Elzinga started his own greenhouse. "When I turned 29, I was at the top, employment wise, already," Elzinga said. "The only thing left was to wait for my dad or his partner to get out of the business, and I didn't want to do that. So I started Mark Elzinga Greenhouses in Comstock, Mich." Elzinga then started another greenhouse, Elzinga Brothers, also in Portage, Mich., a few years later, Elzinga's father and his partner

retired, and Elzinga took over the business. So, now with three greenhouse companies totaling 25 acres, Elzinga sells to local independents and a large Midwest chain store.

Elzinga prides himself in working with seed, an item that is not as popular these days. "Everyone was getting excited about vegetative items, and we were selling mostly seed items," he explains. "We weren't taking a back seat; we had strong sales, but no one was excited about our product. Every time we'd go to a conference or a show and talk about what's new for next year, most people would talk about how they increased sales on vegetative items. We're quite a large company doing something really well with our seed production, and we weren't ready to change that. So, we decided to develop a seed item that would cause a little excitement," and forth came the idea of a marketing program. "We figured we were like a steakhouse that served good steak. You didn't want to stray from the steak, but you had to start adding salads and fish for other people to keep your customer base building."

With all of these acres, greenhouses and clients, Elzinga knew his new marketing program needed to be special. "We wanted a program that kind of flew underneath the radar that we could keep exclusive to our retailers and they could advertise that it was exclusive to them." But Elzinga wasn't only thinking of his customers, he was also thinking of the end customer. "People read magazines and books; they know who Martha Stewart is; they know all about gardening. We were trying to develop something that they thought of year-round not just in the spring."

### THE PROGRAM

With consumers steadily increasing their outside time, Elzinga took his concepts and ran. The program he developed, Tropical Flavors, debuted in 1999, and both its name and design — an ocean scene with palm trees and tropical plants — give consumers a vacation feel when they hear and see it.

The idea of a marketing program wasn't new to Elzinga. He had a program to work off of called Perfect Accents, which consists of accent plants, such as spikes and vinca vine. "We took this accent program, scrubbed it up and made it pretty. We put it in a blue flat, gave it a name, put flat talkers on the end of the trays and our sales

went through the roof." The blue flat may not sound like such a program-altering factor, but it was, and that's why they decided to use the customized blue with Tropical Flavors. "We found that color really sells; uniqueness sells," Elzinga explained. On the retail end you've got flats over here that are all black and now over here you've got blue flats with POP material and bench tape and banners and design, and automatically people are drawn to that."

Packaging means a lot with any product, even if we sometimes tell ourselves the product should sell itself. It doesn't always, especially when the products — in this case pansies, marigolds, dianthus, snaps, etc. — have been around and available for many years. And while amazing advancements have been made in the breeding of these crops, most consumers don't know it. This is where POP and packaging play such big roles. The merchandising system has to stand out; it's the first thing consumers see, and that's what makes this program so unique — the packaging. Elzinga is very grateful to all of the industry friends who helped him with this program. "Some people have been very influential," Elzinga expressed. "We've had numerous meetings with these people, brainstorming and working out the kinks." ♦



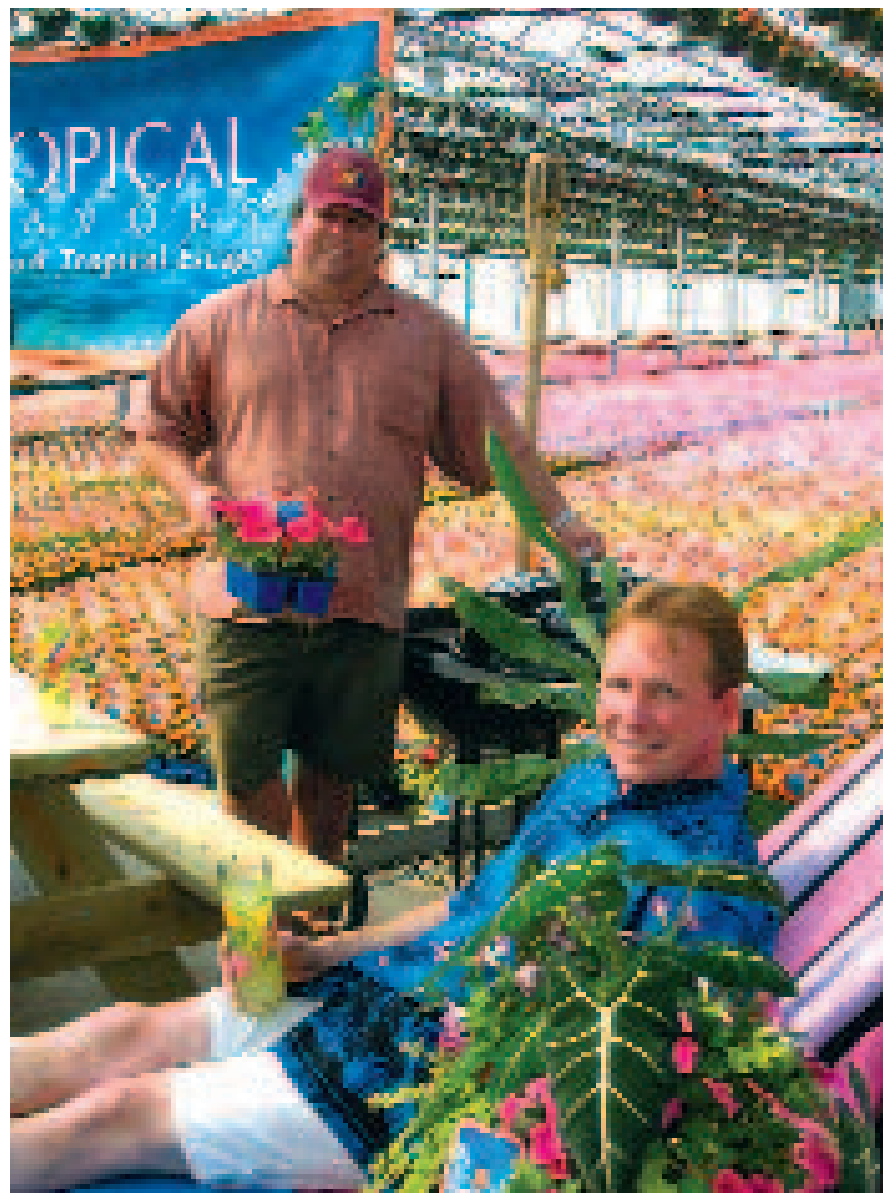
## marketing

"I worked with designers, and they were wonderful," Elzinga said. "I told them I would make quick decisions; they could show me something, and I wouldn't be wishy washy. That's how we moved quickly through things." Now they are on their second generation of Tropical Flavors design, adding a border and a new color to the design. "The first ones were nice, but now, with the second generation, we're able to add some colors and use tropical plants for the POP. I think everything builds over the years. It's changing all of the time."

There are always learning experiences when it comes to a program like this. Elzinga learned a few things along the way. "In the beginning we used jumbo 606 flats — premium flats," Elzinga said. "The jumbo became a depressed commodity in our industry. It was driven down by some other retailers, and we decided to move out of that. We moved into a 306, and the plan really started to come together because the retailer could sell it for more money."

Many factors need to come together to make a great and unique marketing program — the concept, the POP, the customer, the design, the product — and you can't skimp when it comes to these. "You can't compare this item to anything else out there. It's different, and we spent a lot of money and time in the merchandising. For example, those handles are pretty expensive, but they're beautiful; they make the package. So if we spend a little bit there and can get more on the other end, it all works out great."

Just like Elzinga built off of another one of his programs, something is in the works built from Tropical Flavors. "We'd like to develop a four-season program," Elzinga said. "We're looking at an offshoot of this called Autumn Flavors, which will consist of fall annuals and mums. We've taken this Tropical Flavors and spun a new theme for a different time of year," Elzinga said, which just goes to show how far an idea can go and how far you can take it. "So your goals change as you're developing these things."





## MIA — Could you be the next winner?

Patterned after a similar program in Australia, the *GPN*/MasterTag Marketing Innovation Award debuted in 1999, with Washington-based Etera as the first winner, followed by Fernlea Flowers' Icicle Pansy program then Altman Plants' Viva Herbs. And last year's winner was Plants That Work from Novalis, Inc. This program was started as a way to communicate to the entire industry the benefits of growers helping to sell their products to gardening consumers. The program's objectives are to encourage innovation in marketing green goods at the grower level and to promote successful examples of unique marketing programs in the industry. As in the four previous years, winners will be awarded at the OFA Short Course in July.

The entry period for this award ran from July-December 2003. Nominations were taken from individual companies, allied industry representatives, industry consultants and other knowledgeable sources and were judged on their merit by the *GPN* and MasterTag staffs. The first-place winner appears in the June issue of *GPN*. Applications were open to all greenhouse and nursery producers of plant products in North America. If you are interested in applying for next year's award, make sure your company's marketing/merchandising program is introduced to the retail market prior to entering the competition. Entries are due by December 15, 2004 and will be accepted as early as July. For consideration, contact MasterTag's Joe Fox at (800) 253-0439.



## INSPIRATION AND ADVICE

The best ideas are usually branches of an already great idea. "All these ideas we use, we've stolen them from all the best places," Elzinga admitted. "You see what other people are doing and try to make it unique to your own uses."

You can find this inspiration in many places. "If you don't know anything about marketing, there's help out there. You don't have to be an expert," Elzinga said. "There are experts who can help you get your program on track." Consult your reps or other experts in the industry who have seen what works and what doesn't, but make sure to have an idea of what you want ahead of time.

"You want to define your goals for what you want to do and what you want to be," Elzinga said. Look at your company — what do you do best; what are you

known for; what facet of your business could you not do without? Take advantage of that, and use it in a marketing program. While marketing programs are a great way to distinguish yourself, you can take it a step further and design one for the company you know best and the one that would benefit from it the most — your company. **GPN**

**Carrie Burns is managing editor for GPN. She may be reached by phone at (847) 391-1019 or E-mail at [cburns@sgcmail.com](mailto:cburns@sgcmail.com).**

### LearnMore

For more information related to this article, go to [www.gpnmag.com/lm.cfm/gp060402](http://www.gpnmag.com/lm.cfm/gp060402)



Perfectly proportioned again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again.

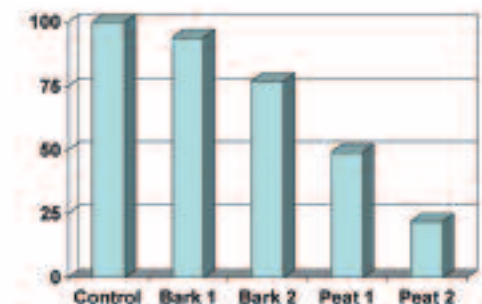


©2004 Syngenta. Syngenta Professional Products, Greensboro, NC 27419. Bonzi® is a trademark of Syngenta.

## Media Components Affect Bonzi Activity, Part 2

Last month, we looked at how pine bark reduces the activity of Bonzi and other growth regulators applied to media. Very decomposed, or pine bark with a smaller particle size, has a greater surface area and, therefore, a greater effect on Bonzi activity. This is different from the effect pine bark has on nutrients. The absorption of Bonzi by pine bark is also different from the cation-exchange type binding of positive nutrient ions, such as calcium and potassium. This is also important because inorganic components that have cation exchange sites (CEC), such as vermiculite, do not reduce the activity of Bonzi.

Pine bark's effect is much greater than other components, but all organic components, including peat, absorb plant growth regulators to some extent. Bonzi has good activity in all peat-based media; however, as shown in the accompanying graph, different batches of peat may vary in their effect on Bonzi. The effect of coir is similar to peat. Inorganic components, such as perlite and vermiculite, do not absorb Bonzi. Therefore, Bonzi



This figure is a general illustration of the effects different pine bark and Canadian peat samples have on Bonzi activity. Control is no Bonzi.

may have slightly greater activity in well-drained mixes with higher percentages of inorganic components.

Media components are important if early sprays are applied when media is exposed. Much of the Bonzi activity in this situation is through the media, and there will be less "drench effect" in a bark-based mix.

Bonzi recommendations are generally based on peat mixes. Due to the variations in barks and the percentages used in different mixes, it is impossible to give precise rates for drenches to bark mixes. Growers with a bark mix should do trials to determine optimum Bonzi rates for their individual situations, using a starting point about twice the

# Bonzi

Tip of the Month

Write in 713